ABSTRACT

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease which kills more than three million people every year. Although both a vaccine and various methods of diagnosis and treatment are available, the efficacy of these measures is in urgent need of improvement given that the number of new cases is once again on the increase. Research focuses, among other things, on the characterization of antigens secreted in the early stages of the infection as they constitute the first point of contact of the immune system with the pathogen. The 40 KD-antigen described herein is present *in vivo* as a hexamer and, despite its high molecular weight and lack of a signal sequence, is present extracellularly after only a few days of growth. Functionally, it is an L-alanine dehydrogenase and reacts with the monoclonal antibody HBT-10 directed against this protein. HBT-10 was the first known antibody specific to a protein of *M. tuberculosis* which did not cross-react with the vaccine strain *M. bovis* BCG.